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ABSTRACT

Intended to help college and high school students use vacation breaks for taking action on vocational decisions, this activity guide describes the process of career decisionmaking and presents an outline to be followed when actually engaging in the process. The outline includes five segments, each made up of a checklist of suggested activities oriented toward facilitating a career choice: (1) Self-Exploration, (2) Occupational Exploration, (3) Tentative Occupational Choice, (4) Reality Testing, and (5) Next Steps. (BL)

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Vacation Guide to Vocational Decisions

Mary L. Roark

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DEDICATION

This booklet is dedicated to the search for some of life's meaning on the part of Michael, Lisa, Chris, Andrea, Cara, Miriam, Cathy, Dan, Laura, Glenn, David, Teresa, Brett, Frank, Dorothy, Becky, Cindy, Eric, Margaret, Bob, Jane, and the others yet to join the family.

THANKS

Appreciation is warmly expressed to El Roark who edited this booklet, to Marilyn Shaw who designed the cover, and to Johnnie Miles who encouraged the production. All three have contributed much to the author in many other dimensions as well.

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On the following pages, you will find a variety of suggestions for talking, thinking, reading, writing, observing and doing to further your career development. It is not expected that you will want to do every activity; the variety is given so that you can choose that which fits your own style of learning and your own specific needs. The ideas are not all-inclusive and you will probably think of other ways to get at the same outcomes.

A framework for making career decisions is outlined. Ideas are then given for specific action relating to each of the steps in the career decision making sequence. You may want to skip entire sections if the activities cover information with which you are already familiar.

There is one assumption held in the writing of this booklet that must be identified. That assumption is that you want to make the decisions which will affect your life.

So, go to it; have a great vacation and, at the same time, make progress toward your vocational decisions.

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THE PROCESS OF CAREER DECISION MAKING

Career decision making in its most productive form follows a definite process. It is important to know this process for two reasons: 1) it can help you identify your current stage of career planning in order to know what else must be done, and 2) it can help you recycle the whole process in the years ahead when there will be new career choices to be made.

The process of career decision making begins with self-exploration. How well do you know yourself? What do you value? What do you like? What are you good at doing? What kind of people do you like to be around? What do you want from life? What are your limits? Almost everything important about you and to you must be assessed in terms of your future occupational life.

Occupational exploration is the second step of career decision making. Freedom of choice is a favored theme in all of American life; yet, one of the limitations of your freedom to choose a future career is the extent to which you are unaware of occupations. You will not choose to be a fletcher unless you know what a fletcher is. As many as 40,000 job titles presently exist in the United States with new job titles being added every year. Even though it is impossible to know all the occupations

available for consideration, it is to your advantage to be aware of the broad occupational categories and of the specific job titles within those areas that most appeal to you.

Making tentative choices is the third step in career decision making. You will begin to merge the knowledge about yourself and the knowledge you have about occupations to arrive at several possible alternatives for your future career.

Considering alterantives also means considering consequences, many of which might be beyond your control. However, the more clearly you have examined possible action, the more likely you are to make a decision to your advantage. Remember that the choices you are making at this time are tentative; they are not binding but give you a framework for exploring specific occupations in more depth.

Reality testing is the fourth step in career decision making. This requires checking out a tentative choice to determine if you would actually enjoy that occupation. It is at this stage that you look for in-depth information on skills, training, nature of the work, requirements, place of employment, salary, working conditions, potential for self satisfaction, employment outlook, and other considerations for the years ahead. All this information is to be assessed in light of what you know about yourself. Reality testing is a necessity before more firm commitments for your future are to be made.

The last step in the process can take several variations. If you are comfortable with one or more of your tentative choices, you would take action which would eventually lead to employment. Should you not find your tentative choices appealing, you can recycle the entire decision making process; that is, repeat the sequence again looking for occupations that seem to offer promise for you. By this time, you will have an increased awareness and increased information both of yourself and of occupational possibilities; the recycling process will build on that knowledge. A third alternative at this point is to use all you know about yourself to design your own job. In this venture you write your ideal job description and then take action to create or find a position that matches the job description you have written.

In the remainder of this booklet, you will find the steps of the career decision making framework used as section headings, with suggestions for vacation action that can further your career development in that stage. The first section is a general one which considers the entire process. The rest of the sections deal specifically with individual steps in the career decision making sequence. Some of the activities are appropriate for several stages, so do not consider the boundaries between the career decision making steps to be iron walls. There is much overlap and you can often facilitate your advancement in one stage while you work on another.

The blank pages on the left sides of this booklet can be used to record your activities and discoveries. The last page of this booklet has

space for you to add your own ideas for activities to facilitate your career development. The author would like to learn of your creativity in career planning and also would be receptive to any comments about the Vacation Guide to Vocational Decisions.

Vacations often offer new places and new associates. You can use these, as well as chance happenings, for increased awareness and fresh knowledge to apply to the process of career decision making.

It is not easy to choose a career in a world filled with so many possibilities and so many uncertainties. But doing something gives you more of a basis for a decision than doing nothing. Choose a starting point; try an activity; assess what you know; and you will be on your way. At the same time, have a good time!

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_____Complete Where Do I Go From Here with My Life? The Crystal Life Planning Manual, J. Crystal and R. Bolles, Seabury Press, 815 Second Ave., N.Y., N.Y., 10017, $7.95.

_____Join a career exploration group at a nearby college or agency, especially if you learn best through interaction with others.

_____Take advantage of new places during vacation to examine the occupational possibilities in a setting different from your usual one.

_____Improve your communication skills through self-study, practice, or classes. Regardless of your eventual career decisions, clearly expressing yourself in writing and speaking will be essential for obtaining and keeping satisfactory employment.

_____Meditate

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accomplishments, hobbies, best courses in school, favorite kind of people, physical attributes, most comfortable settings, desired family relationships, and anything else you know about yourself.

_____Enter into a counseling relationship with the goal of increased self-awareness.

_____Consider your physical condition and appearance as a personal asset. Do what you can during vacation to maintain or improve this asset.

A. Interests and Activities

_____List the items from your autobiography which indicate your interests for those situations, activities, and happenings that have engaged your attention over the years. Do not limit yourself only to what you think is useful in an occupation.

_____List 20 things you really like to do. Assess this list to see if any can be used vocationally. Rank order the top five you would not want to give up at any cost.

_____Analyze which specific activities please you most when dealing 1) with people; 2) with things; and 3) with ideas.

_____Identify which activities you do not like and what situations you would like to avoid in the years ahead.

_____ Use vacation recreation to help you identify the kind and amount of leisure you would like during the years when you will be working. You might also identify the kind, amount, and source of life-long learning you would desire.

B. Skills and Abilities

_____ From your autobiography, write down all the skills you have developed over the years. Include common skills and uncommon skills, minor skills and major skills. Your own combination of abilities contributes to your uniqueness, and it is this uniqueness that you will be applying to your career life.

_____ Have several close friends or relatives list your skills. Compare their perceptions with your own.

_____ List 20 accomplishments. These need not be major accomplishments but rather those things you have done which have given you personal satisfaction. Identify the specific skills you used in these situations.

_____ Learn new skills through hobbies and work. Spend some money on new things to do. Browse hobby shops. Set a summer goal of some definite accomplishment. Improve present skills through practice. Find a "master" at some skill who is willing to help you learn his or her skill.

C. Values and Goals

_____From your autobiography, identify the values that run as a thread through your life.

_____List in rank order five personal values or concepts in which you believe that will affect your occupational life and decisions. Consider those of highest significance to you, such as service, money, stability, family life, independence, and creativity.

_____Do the goal setting exercises outlined in How to Get Control of Your Time and Your Life by Alan Lakein, Signet Books, 1301 Avenue of the Americas, N.Y., N.Y., 10019, $1.50. The value in goal setting exercises of this sort lies in doing the task itself rather than in developing a masterplan for the rest of your life. Situations will change and you will change; goals help give direction for the immediate future.

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_____Get a summer job. Even if it is not the most exciting summer job in the world, you will learn some things about yourself in the working world and you will learn some things about work itself.

_____If you live in a rural area, plan a trip to a near-by urban area to observe and to talk to workers and employers.

_____Look at <u>everything</u> around you in terms of occupations. Who did it? Why? How? Where?

_____Read bulletin boards on campuses, in factories, in libraries. Look for information of job fields and for specific job vacancies. Question what you would need in order to do the work advertised.

_____Read newspapers with a view focused on occupational roles and duties.

_____Watch others at work. What do they do? What do they seem to gain from their work?

_____Talk to many people. Almost everyone will tell you about his or her work and can give a viewpoint on its advantages and disadvantages. What do they do? What are their rewards? How did they get started? Where did they find their jobs? Do not overlook parents and relatives as you attempt to understand work. People most familiar to you can both give you personal information and help you gain confidence for further interviews.

_____Take informal surveys on work attitudes. How do people feel about their work? Why do people get promoted? Why do people get fired? What satisfactions are people finding in work? Assess these opinions in terms of other knowledge you have gained about yourself and about occupations.

_____Read broadly on occupations. Ask for the Occupational Outlook Handbook and other career materials at the public library.

_____Read Working: People Talk about What They Do All Day and How They Feel about What They Do, by Studs Terkel, The Hearst Corporation, 959 Eighth Avenue, N.Y., N.Y., 10019, $2.25.

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III. TENTATIVE OCCUPATIONAL CHOICE
(merging self and work information into possible alternatives)

_____Fantasize what you would most like to do; how you would most like to use your skills, interests, and values; in which setting you would most like to work.

_____Crosscheck information gained on occupations with your personal inventory. Which occupations seem to have the potential for matching important factors about yourself?

_____ Talk about yourself with people who know you well (friends, parents, relatives, professors), not for their advice but for their insight on you and on occupations that might fit you.

_____ Take survey courses in various areas in summer school.

_____ Consider all the problems you see in society. Pinpoint those you would like to help solve.

_____ Go to the library or career resources center and look through a standard reference book of occupational information. Select job titles that seem to have the potential for satisfying your abilities, interests, and values. Some references are Occupational Outlook Handbook, Dictionary of Occupational Titles, Encyclopedia of Careers, and Occupational Thesaurus.

_____ Use the Self Directed Search and Occupations Finder, Appendices B and C in Making Vocational Choices: A Theory of Careers by J. Holland, Prentice-Hall, Inc. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 07632, $4.95. The Self Directed Search helps you assess personal traits and gives you a system for identifying occupations in which people with traits similar to yours often are successful and satisfied.

_____ Read books, magazine articles, or other materials about a specific field.

_____Build a chart of the information you have gathered on possible alternatives. Areas where you need information include: nature of the work, work environment, qualifications for employment, physical demands, desired aptitudes, helpful interests, necessary skills, legal requirements, preparation, methods of entrance, needed capital for education and/or establishment, earnings, advancement, number and distribution of workers, employment prospects, advantages, and disadvantages. Assess chart in light of what you know about yourself.

_____Project likely consequences in following a given direction.

_____Consider preparation, such as a dual major in college, which will give you the option of at least two career directions. Unless you are preparing for work with very specific training such as law or medicine, you most likely will not stay in one career field the rest of your life.

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_____Determine employment outlook in the field of your choice from written materials and personal interviews or by a visit to a state employment office.

_____Arrange a visit with an employer in the area of your occupational interest.

_____Read the professional journals and publications in your career field.

_____Interview persons working in the fields of your choice, asking all the questions for which you would like answers.

_____Ask for information from the government bureau which licenses and regulates employment in a specific field.

_____Examine whether your interests parallel those of persons employed in a given field. The Strong-Campbell Interest Inventory and other tests are available in many state employment offices or through counseling and testing services on college campuses.

_____Tour work sites.

_____Read job openings advertised in technical, trade, and professional journals. Read the newspaper want ads. Look for the kind of jobs in which you might eventually like to work. Attempt to get a view of outlook for various areas and whether the job you will look for is likely to be advertised.

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V. NEXT STEPS

A. Toward Employment
(if you still like one of your tentative choices)

_____Arrange for any further training such as courses to be taken, schools to be entered, attributes to be strengthened.

_____Write to educational institutions for catalogs and information. Read guides to entering graduate school programs, apprenticeships, and technical training.

_____Look into the possibility of doing co-op work in the area of your choice.

_____Work for free; do volunteer work in companies, industries, and agencies that include the type of work in which you are interested.

_____Get "on the job" experience through paid work. Test your interests and aptitudes in a specific work setting.

_____Read about writing resumes; make up a sample resume and have someone critique it for weaknesses. Improve those areas either by rewriting or by gaining necessary experience.

_____Draft a basic letter of inquiry for a job opening.

_____Make a listing of potential employers, especially if you want to locate in a

particular geographic area. Use yellow pages of telephone book and city directories.

_____Interview placement personnel in colleges, private agencies, and government agencies to learn the steps you will need to take for employment. Also learn the conditions of using the different types of placement agencies.

_____Attend public meetings and seminars related to your career choice. Observe the professionals at these meetings. Take note of the topics and issues discussed.

_____Make a list of questions you would want to ask a prospective employer.

_____Develop answers to questions employers frequently ask about why you want to work for them, your career goals, what you expect of a job, and salary requirements.

_____Talk to employers in your chosen field. Find out what kind of qualities they are looking for in employees. Get their viewpoints on what you can do now to better your opportunities for future employment.

_____Gain confidence in interviewing employers for information on their institution. Since about 80% of job vacancies are not advertised but found through direct contact or personal contacts, learn what you can now about how to approach employers. At the same time, you may be laying the groundwork for future job offers. Remember that you are interviewing for information at this point and not to get a specific job.

_____Study all the literature available on specific employers you plan to interview for a job opening. Some of this information can be found in libraries, newspapers, and city directories. Some large companies have promotional brochures. Another source is to contact employees of that company who would share their materials on company practices, policies, and benefits.

_____Read Go Hire Yourself an Employer by R. Irish, Doubleday Anchor Books, Garden City, N.Y., $2.95. Irish helps the job seeker gain control of the hiring process.

_____Read Who's Hiring Who, R. Lathrop, Reston Publishing Company, Reston, Va., $4.95. There is excellent information in this book about writing resumes, writing letters of application, and interviewing employers.

B. Recycling
(if you find your tentative choice does not fit you)

_____Recycle the above process of gaining knowledge about yourself and about occupations, making tentative choices, and testing those choices.

_____Personalize the elements of career decision making with the help of a counselor. Colleges, high schools, and some agencies offer counseling services at no cost to you.

C. Creating a Job
(creating your own possibilities)

_____Disregard occupational titles and design your own job. Write a career description that would satisfy the interests, skills and values you have in the service of some employer.

_____Write a summary statement such as this:

Because I am a person who is good at _____

_____

because the things I like to do are _____

_____ _____

and because my values include _____

_____

my ideal job would be working as a _____

_____

in a _____

setting. I would like it if the work also

included _____

_____.

_____Complete The Quick Job Hunting Map, by R. Bolles, Ten Speed Press, 900 Modoc, Berkeley, Calif., 94707, $1.25. This booklet is especially helpful for identifying your skills, deciding where you would most enjoy using your skills, and finding a place to use them.

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